# What makes a positive school community?

"Mum, Miss Collins told me to be sure you go to the school for the meeting tonight. She says it's very important." "You're not in trouble, are you Omar? Teachers only ask parents to come to school when there is a problem, don't they?" "No Mum. She says she is looking forward to meeting you."

When Rasheeda got to the meeting it wasn't as she had expected. Lots of other parents were there and they were talking with each other and with the teacher. It seemed quite friendly. The teacher explained what the children would be learning in school this term and then asked the parents to talk to two different people they didn't know.

Rasheeda felt a bit shy about this. Luckily, the other parents at her table started talking to her. They asked her what school was like in her home country. "Oh, very different!" she told them. "Over there the teacher talks and the children listen. They don't learn in groups. They start early and they go home at lunchtime." The other parents seemed interested.

Miss Collins also spoke with her: "Rasheeda, I wonder if there's anything more you would like to know about how Omar is going or what we are doing at school? We want to be sure you feel welcome, so if there is anything the school can do to help you or Omar settle in, please let us know."

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# What feeling included is all about

Children come from an endless range of different families, backgrounds, cultures and religions. They also have a variety of interests, learning styles and abilities. Despite all of these differences, everyone should feel included and welcome within their school community.

Positive school communities create opportunities for children, families and staff to feel included. They make help and support accessible and find lots of ways to invite people to take up the support being offered. They help everyone benefit from understanding experiences and cultures that may be different to their own.

When children feel included, when they are part of a community that promotes inclusion and respect for everybody, they show more caring and compassion towards others, and they feel safer and more secure. They are also better learners and have better mental health and wellbeing. In a positive school community *every face has a place*, every voice is valued, and everyone has something to contribute.

School communities from around Australia chose care, compassion, respect, understanding and inclusion as important values for children to understand. These are things that children can learn about. The best learning happens when children see the adults around them putting values like these into practice. Feeling included is important for mental health, and is supported best when diversity is respected and valued.

## Some ways of showing people they are welcomed and included at school

- Display information, posters, and artwork that reflect the diversity in the school community.
- Provide information in appropriate languages, verbally, where possible, as well as in written form.
- Cater to specific needs where possible (eg dietary needs, access needs).
- Publicly celebrate diversity (eg diverse families, cultures, languages and values).

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Being included and learning to include and respect others are very important for children's social development.

Being included promotes belonging and connectedness, which are also key factors for supporting children's mental health and wellbeing.

## How parents and carers can help

- Get to know other families, take an interest in others' different backgrounds as well as what you have in common.
- Set up a 'buddy' system where families who have been at the school for a while buddy up with new families to provide welcome and support.
- Encourage children to include and appreciate others' cultural and individual differences.

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This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at **www.kidsmatter.edu.au**

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